

Wrap the Holiday Gift Season with Safety

Picking out a child's holiday toys is almost as exciting for parents as it is for the children who get to rip open the packages. And while parents spend countless hours combing the aisles and scanning the catalogues for this year's perfect gift, safety must be at the top of every parent's holiday toy shopping list.

Making the right toy selection for a child can be easy when parents are armed with the right knowledge. Each year, over 3 billion toys and games are sold in the United States, and more than half are purchased during the holiday season. However, in 2002 alone, an estimated 165,200 children ages 14 and under were treated in hospital emergency rooms for toy-related injuries. And although the majority of toys are safe, some can become dangerous if used incorrectly or if they end up with a child that is too young for a specific gift.

"Toys are more than just fun – they're crucial to a child's development," says Martin Eichelberger, M.D., director of Emergency Trauma Services, Children's National Medical Center and president and CEO of the National SAFE KIDS Campaign. "But parents need to be mindful of the age and safety recommendations on the labels of every single toy. Parents also need to take into account not only children's cognitive skills, but their capacity to handle the toy safely."

The National SAFE KIDS Campaign recommends the following tips for selecting gifts this holiday season:

Choose Safe Toys

Even innocent-looking toys – such as marbles and balloons – can present dangers to children. The Child Safety Protection Act, a federal toy labeling law, requires manufacturers to place warning labels on toys that pose a choking hazard to young children. When selecting a toy for your child, **avoid** the following:

- **Toys with small removable parts.** The small parts that can be removed from the toy can pose a choking hazard to children under age 3. Use a small parts tester (which can be purchased at a toy or baby specialty store) to measure the size of the toy or part. If the piece fits entirely inside the tube, then it is considered a choking hazard.
- **Toys with sharp points or edges.** Children may unintentionally cut themselves or another person.
- **Toys that produce loud noises.** Toy guns and high-volume portable cassette players can permanently impair a child's hearing.
- **Propelled toy darts and other projectiles.** Propelled toys can cause cuts or serious eye injuries.
- **Toys with strings, straps or cords longer than 7 inches.** They could wrap around a child's neck and unintentionally cause strangulation.

- **Electrical toys.** They are a potential burn hazard. Avoid toys with a heating element—such as batteries or electrical plugs—for children under age 8.
- **Toys painted with lead paint.** Exposure to lead can result in lead poisoning, causing serious damage to a child's brain, kidneys and nervous system.
- **Toy cap guns.** Paper roll, strip or ring caps can be ignited by the slightest friction and cause serious burns.
- **Toys that have been recalled.** Check the **Web site of the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission** (www.cpsc.gov) regularly to obtain information on recent toy recalls. Return to manufacturers the warranty and product registration forms for new toy purchases to ensure that you will be notified of any recalls

In addition, when selecting a gift, follow age recommendations.

Many toy-related injuries occur when parents overestimate a child's ability to handle a toy designed for an older age group. For instance, when a label says, "this toy is not appropriate for children under 3," it isn't because the manufacturer thinks the item might be too tough for a 24-month-old to figure out, but because the toy is small (or has small parts) and poses a choking hazard.

Enjoy the toys safely.

- **Make sure toys are enjoyed in a safe environment. Always supervise children at play.**
- **Check older toys.** If you are at another family's home, make sure the toys they generously offer your children are also safe. Inspect old and new toys regularly for damage and potential hazards. Make any necessary repairs immediately or discard damaged toys out of children's reach.

Remember, a Gift is Not Complete Unless the Proper Protective Gear is Included!

Bicycles, in-line skates, scooters, skateboards and sleds are also popular gifts for the holidays. However, if children lack the proper protective gear or skills, injury and death can occur. In 2001, 134 children were killed in bicycle-related incidents, and injuries resulting from bicycles, scooters, skateboards, and in-line and roller skates accounted for well over half a million emergency room visits for children ages 14 and under.

The National SAFE KIDS Campaign recommends the following tips when buying bicycles, tricycles, scooters, skates, skateboards or sleds this holiday season:

- **Include a helmet as part of the gift.** A helmet is a necessity, not an accessory and should be worn every time he rides. Bicycle helmets have been shown to reduce the risk of head injury by as much as 85 percent and the risk

of brain injury by as much as 88 percent. Make sure the helmet meets or exceeds the safety standards developed by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission.

- **Give a horn or a bell as a stocking stuffer.** It's essential for a bicyclist to warn motorists and pedestrians of his or her presence.
- **Include elbow pads and kneepads with the helmet when giving in-line skates, scooters, roller skates or skateboards as gifts.** Make sure to include wrist guards for in-line skates, roller skates and skateboards.
- **Give in-line skating lessons from a professional instructor or a community recreation center.** A class will provide instruction on how to skate properly and proper skating etiquette.
- **Buy a sled that is constructed sturdily and safely.** Avoid equipment with sharp and jagged edges.
- **Supervise your child when on a riding toy.** Riding toys are the leading cause of toy-related injury. Make sure your child rides in safe areas and away from stairs, traffic or swimming pools.

Deck the Halls (and the Rest of the Home) with Childproof Safety Measures this Holiday Season

With the kids on break from school and out-of-town family coming for a visit, safety is often *not* top of mind during the winter holiday season. There are decorations to hang, favorite recipes to prepare and a car load of gifts to wrap. But amid the holiday hustle, busy parents may forget their most important task. Whether it's checking the Christmas lights, or securing the Kwanzaa or menorah candles, ensuring a safe and festive environment for children is the most important holiday preparation of all.

Residential fires are an increased hazard during the holiday decorating season. According to the U.S. Fire Administration, candles will be the source of approximately 1,600 home fires during this time. If improperly maintained or ignored, Christmas trees pose a potential fire risk – causing about 200 fires during the holidays every year.

“Whether it's Hanukah, Kwanzaa or Christmas, parents and guardians are focused on creating that special holiday experience. But sometimes, when important safety measures are overlooked, parents unknowingly put their children at risk during this season,” says Martin Eichelberger, M.D., CEO and president of the National SAFE KIDS Campaign. “Decorations, though beautiful and fun, are often the biggest culprits. By taking a few simple precautions with Christmas trees, candles and other decorations, parents can help keep holiday celebrations safe for the entire family.”

The National SAFE KIDS Campaign suggests the following guidelines to keep the holiday season safe:

Lights:

- **Decorate your tree using only UL (Underwriters' Laboratories)-approved lights and cords.**
- **Inspect lights for exposed or frayed wires, loose connections or broken sockets.**
- **Do not overload extension cords.** Use no more than three strings of lights on one extension cord.
- **Never run an electrical cord under a carpet.**
- **Be sure to secure electrical cords so that children cannot pull them and topple the tree.**
- **Turn off the tree lights when you go to bed, leave the house or otherwise leave the tree unattended.**

Christmas Trees:

- **If you choose to buy a natural tree, look for a fresh one.** Fresh trees are less likely to catch fire than older trees. *(A safer option is to buy a fire-resistant artificial tree.)*
- **Keep your tree in a container full of water and check it daily.**
- **Use a wide-based stand to make sure the tree is secure and will not fall over.**
- **Cover the tree basin with a tree skirt or blanket.**
- **Keep the tree away from heat sources such as fireplaces, radiators and heating vents.**
- **Cut back the lower branches to avoid eye injuries to small children.**
- **Decorate your tree with children in mind.**
- **Do not put ornaments that are breakable, have small detachable parts or metal hooks or look like food or candy on the lower branches where small children can reach them.**
- **Also, make sure tree lights are hung out of reach of young children.**
- **Never burn Christmas tree branches, treated wood or even wrapping paper in your fireplace.**
- **Dispose of your tree promptly after the holidays.**

Candles:

- **Avoid using candles.** If you do use candles, make sure they are in a stable holder and placed where they cannot be easily knocked down.
- **Do not leave lit candles unattended.** Never put candles on a Christmas tree, and never leave the house with candles left burning.
- **Do not place candles near draperies or anything that might easily catch fire.**
- **Keep candles out of children's reach; keep matches and lighters out of sight and locked away.**
- **Teach children not to touch or play with candles, matches or lighters.**

General Fire Safety Tips:

- **Install smoke alarms in your home on every level and in every sleeping area.**
- **Test alarms once a month and replace the batteries at least once a year.** Home fires and home fire-related deaths are more likely to occur during the cold-weather months.
- **Plan and practice several fire escape routes from each room of your home, and identify an outside meeting place.**
- **Plan how adults can escape with babies.** The risk of residential fire death in the United States for children under the age of 5 is twice that of the rest of the population.

Fire Safety for Children:

- **Teach children what a smoke alarm sounds like.**
- **Teach children to crawl low under smoke.** More than 70 percent of childhood fire deaths are caused by the smoke and toxic gases produced as a fire develops and spreads.
- **Teach children to cover their mouths and noses.** A moist towel is best, but a t-shirt or any cloth within reach can protect lungs from dangerous fumes.
- **Teach children to touch doors before opening them.** If the door is hot, they should use an alternative exit.
- **Teach children never to go back into a burning building.** Children should be reminded not to stop or return for anything, such as a toy or to call 9-1-1 . A call to 9-1-1 should be placed after leaving the premises.

- **Teach children to “stop, drop and roll.”** Upon leaving a burning house or building, children whose clothes have caught on fire should immediately stop, drop to the ground and roll back and forth to quickly extinguish the flames.
- **Take children to your local fire station for a tour .** Children will be able to see a firefighter in full firefighting gear and learn that he or she is someone who puts out fires and saves children.

Holiday Foods and Ornaments:

Some foods and objects pose a choking hazard to young children, especially children under age 6. To help prevent unintentional choking during the holidays:

- **Keep round, hard foods and candies such as candy cane pieces, mints, nuts and popcorn out of reach of young children.**
- **Keep small ornaments, tinsel, figurines and other decorations away from children's reach.** Young children have a tendency to put everything in their mouths.

Poisons:

While preparing your home for the holidays, be aware of seemingly innocent and unexpected forms of poisons.

- **Install UL-approved carbon monoxide detectors in your home.**
- **Open the flue in your fireplace when burning wood to provide adequate ventilation .** The risk of carbon monoxide poisoning increases dramatically in the winter. Proper ventilation of fuel-burning appliances reduces this risk. Check these appliances annually and before you first use them in cold-weather months.
- **Keep alcoholic drinks and their containers out of reach .** Holiday beverages such as eggnog laced with alcohol may be sweet and inviting to young children. Do not leave alcoholic drinks unattended. They can be harmful to children who consume them.
- **Keep the common baking ingredients vanilla and almond extracts out of reach .** They contain high levels of alcohol and may be harmful to young children.
- **Beware of fire salts used in fireplaces to produce colored flames.** They contain heavy metals and cause intense gastrointestinal irritation or vomiting if eaten.
- **Keep poisonous plants out of reach.** Watch for holly and mistletoe berries that fall on the ground, because they are poisonous if eaten. Other poisonous holiday plants include amaryllis, azalea, boxwood, Christmas rose, Crown of Thorns, English ivy and Jerusalem cherry. Contrary to popular belief,

poinsettias are not poisonous, but they can cause skin irritation and gastrointestinal distress.

- **Avoid using artificial snow sprays to decorate** . These sprays can cause lung irritation if inhaled.
- **Know the Poison Control Center 's national hotline number, 1-800-222-1222, and keep emergency medical service phone numbers by all telephones.** In addition, leave a phone number for babysitters so they can reach you if you go out to a holiday party .

Carbon Monoxide: the Home's Hidden Danger

Winter presents special safety concerns for parents and guardians. As families fire up the furnaces and turn to space heaters for increased warmth, the risk of carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning heightens, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. News accounts of family tragedies sadly confirm this fact.

Each year, carbon monoxide poisoning kills approximately 24 children ages 14 and under and sends more than 3,500 to hospital emergency rooms. Carbon monoxide is a colorless, odorless, poisonous gas that is produced by fuel-burning appliances. You can't see, taste or even smell it. At least five states (Alaska , Rhode Island , West Virginia , New Jersey and New York) and some additional jurisdictions require CO detectors in the home. It is estimated that carbon monoxide detectors may prevent half of all residential carbon monoxide exposure fatalities.

"After removing the items and situations that cause carbon monoxide, it's the first thing parents and caregivers should purchase to protect their families from carbon monoxide poisoning. It's also highly recommended to place them in *every* sleeping area of the home," said Martin Eichelberger, M.D. CEO of the National SAFE KIDS Campaign. "Because of carbon monoxide's very subtle nature, a carbon monoxide poisoning detector could literally mean the difference between life and death."

Carbon monoxide cuts off oxygen to the brain and heart, and can cause death and lead to neurological damage. Effects of CO poisoning may include headache, fatigue, nausea, dizziness and confusion. These symptoms are often mistaken for the flu by unsuspecting parents and even healthcare professionals. The peril to infants and children is particularly high because they have elevated metabolic rates and the gas accumulates in their bodies more rapidly than in adults. Unborn babies have a greater risk of birth defects, neurological disorders and death when a pregnant mother is exposed to carbon monoxide.

Parents should pay close attention to the following culprits of carbon monoxide in the home: unvented supplemental heaters, malfunctioning furnaces, water heaters, ovens, stoves, gas-fired dryers, clogged chimneys, corroded flue pipes and emergency generators, which are the most common sources of residential CO-related poisoning. Automobiles left running in attached garages also pose a hazard, even if the garage doors are open.

The National SAFE KIDS Campaign offers the following tips to protect your child from carbon monoxide poisoning:

- **Install an Underwriters Laboratories (UL)-approved carbon monoxide detector.** *It is estimated that CO detectors may prevent half of all residential CO poisoning deaths.* CO detectors should be installed with an audible warning signal near the separate sleeping areas and outside individual bedrooms. Detectors should be installed (doesn't matter where in the room; CO diffuses) at least 15 feet from fuel-burning appliances.
- **If the CO alarm goes off, evacuate all occupants immediately and call your local emergency number.** Do not re-enter the home without the approval of a fire department representative. If a family member displays symptoms of CO poisoning – or if you have any questions -- seek medical attention right away. Call a qualified professional to investigate the source of the CO buildup.
- **Ensure that space heaters, furnaces, fireplaces and wood-burning stoves are vented properly and inspected annually.** Have your chimney cleaned each year before cold weather arrives.
- **If you must warm up your car by running the engine, remove your vehicle from the garage to warm it up.** Never leave your car's engine running in the garage, particularly if your garage is attached to your home.
- **Never use an oven to heat your home and never use a charcoal grill or hibachi in your home or garage.**
- **When purchasing an existing home, have a qualified technician evaluate the integrity of the heating and cooling systems, as well as the sealed spaces between the garage and house.**